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FM AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4922
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1640
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2100

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NDJAMENA 000129

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/07/2017
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [CD](#) [SU](#) [CRS](#)
SUBJECT: ADDITIONAL FOLLOW-UP MEETING WITH NRF/JEM

REF: A. NDJAMENA 99 B. NDJAMENA 70

Classified By: S/CRS Charles Wintermeyer for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. The NRF has high ambitions for a commanders conference/political meeting scheduled for Abeche starting 12 February. However, there remain issues of who will attend and how much consensus they will reach. Meanwhile, the NRF's renunciation of regime change (as recommended by Special Envoy (SE) Natsios) remains under discussion. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Tadjadine Bechin Niam, National Redemption Front (NRF) Secretary for Reconstruction and Development, and also its representative to the AU, met with Ambassador and EmbOff on 8 February, to follow up on their meeting of 30 January (Ref A).

Commanders Conferences Still In Flux, High Expectations

¶3. (C) Niam discussed a commanders conference now being planned for Abeche, eastern Chad, on 12 February, followed by a political meeting on 13 February. The NRF has military leadership, but needs political leadership, he observed. This conference and meeting would be held under AMIS auspices and the NRF would invite observers. Niam had another meeting that day, with the SLM, after which he hoped to have plans finalized. He said the NRF had requested the GoC to guarantee safe passage to attendees, some of whom, he claimed, would be Darfurians traveling to the conference/meeting from Khartoum.

¶4. (C) Overall, Niam expects 40-50 "high ranking" people to attend. He also wants international observers and plans to invite them, including from the U.S. Embassy. He believes that even if the conference/meetings are contentious, it is better to have disagreements out in the open and to be transparent. In addition to international observers, he wants to invite tribal elders, refugees, and IDPs. He claimed that Mahamet Ali, Minister of State and key Deby confidant, would probably be there, representing the GoC. He also hopes the Norwegian Envoy for Sudan will attend.

¶5. (C) He repeated that the SLM wants to have its own conference first (scheduled for Darfur), then meet with the NRF. He said the SLM accuses the JEM of delaying the start of an NRF political movement. Niam denied that is true and he hopes to start an NRF political movement at this conference.

¶6. (C) Niam hopes to have Abdul Shafi attend, and hopes he will join the NRF at that time. He relayed that some other NRF members questioned why Abdul Shafi would attend since he was not in the NRF. Niam's vision is that the Group of 19 and other groups will have one or two days of meetings (not

conferences) for the groups to talk among themselves. Within the NRF, he is proposing a rotating chairmanship to assuage fears of JEM dominance. He hopes that Adam Bakhit, or his delegate, will attend also. He believes Bakhit is in Abeche now, and that his attendance is important.

¶17. (C) Niam He sees JEM, SLM Group of 19 (G-19), and the Federal Party (headed by Ahmad Ibrihim Drieg) as the leading groups allied within the NRF now. Drieg, he claimed, is with the NRF but has not formally joined yet, nor has any military forces. Niam also wants Abdel Shafi to have the SLM/A join the NRF, which would bring the Fur ethnic group into the NRF's leadership structure. However, he is concerned that Abdul Shafi and Drieg see each other as 'competitors' within the NRF, and it will be more difficult convincing them both to come on board. Abdel Shafi, based on the size of the SLM/A and his position as heir apparent to Abdul Wahid, has indicated he wants a leadership role if he does join his group with the NRF.

Other Players

¶18. (C) He also discussed other personalities involved. He claimed no contact with Minni Minawi, but that Minni was well aware of what is going on. Abdul Wahid, the head of the SLM before it split up, is also no longer a serious player, having chosen the softer life of exile in Europe instead. Niam said that Sharif Harir is with the NRF, but has not formally declared which faction he identifies with. Niam claimed that one Abrecha (the JEM representative in El Fashir) had been appointed as the Vice Governor and Minister of Education in South Darfur. Niam understood that Minni

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Minawi's group was given the governorship of West Darfur, and had heard rumors that Minni's Chief of Staff was not happy, and may pull out.

Renunciation of Regime Change Still Being Worked On

¶19. (C) The Ambassador pushed Niam on issuing a statement renouncing plans for regime change by force, which was one of SE Natsios' key points during his 19 January meeting with rebel leaders in Abeche (Ref B). Niam replied the JEM is ready to make such a statement, but that the issue is still being discussed within the NRF. He said he was trying to "market it" to the other groups and planned on bringing it up at the conference. If the group still could not agree, the JEM might informally renounce regime change as a goal via an interview or press article, but any such comment would have to wait until after the conference, he said.

Chadian Rebel Violence Last Week

¶10. (C) During the fighting at the border town of Adre on last week involving two days of shelling, he claimed the GoC captured 140 rebel prisoners. There are still 20 more wounded rebels in Adre, and the GoC captured 23 rebel Land Cruisers. Even though SCUD may have penetrated the GoC, Niam complimented President Deby on his good intelligence and wisely being defensive-oriented. He claimed that during the Adre fighting, the GoS was preparing for a possible attack on Geneina by the NRF.

Comment

¶11. (C) Despite the high expectations Niam has for the upcoming conference, it remains very tentative and there are many variables. Post will track closely and try to have EmbOffs attend the meeting if/when held in Abeche.

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